

Radio Station, Students Join to Help the Homeless

by Dana Fowle
staff writer

The Central Virginia Foodbank, the Daily Planet, the Emergency Shelter and WRXL-FM have cooked up a recipe for the homeless and the needy that's fast becoming a Richmond Thanksgiving tradition.

WRXL-FM's annual radio-a-thon Nov. 15 brought in more than \$42,000 in pledges, food and clothing from the community for city shelters just in time for the holiday.

The 18-hour music marathon began at 6 a.m. and disc jockeys played Richmond's favorite rock'n'roll songs and answered telephone calls for donations until midnight.

"The most requested songs were 'Stairway to Heaven' [by Led Zeppelin] and a medley by the Grateful Dead, 'Not Fade Away-Go in Down the Road,'" said April Pezzola, public relations

director for WRXL-FM.

"With the Grateful Dead, in particular, people were challenging each other" to pledge more money, she said.

A healthy rivalry was the right ingredient to spur a 60 percent return of people who pledged last year, according to Kandra Parker-Barr, resource coordinator for the Emergency Shelter.

The radio station used their front lobby as a drop-off point for people who donated non-perishable food and clothing to the cause.

A non-profit United Way agency, the Emergency Shelter's Merrill S. Espigh home houses temporarily displaced women and children. Parker-Barr said the shelter gave the DJs a "wish list to read over the air."

"We asked for disposable diapers and baby food for our 27 residents," she said.

The shelter, located on 2 E. Main St., is filled to maximum occupancy at all times, said Parker-

Barr.

The Emergency Shelter also operates a home for a maximum of 33 men seeking employment or temporarily unemployed.

Virginia Commonwealth University joined the fundraiser a week before the radio-a-thon using the Hibbs building, Sanger Hall, the Student Commons, the Franklin Street Gym and the General Purpose Academic building as drop-off points for food.

"We had a week to get it together," said Melissa Burnside, media relations director for VCU. "We got the word out on campus by fliers and word-of-mouth."

Burnside added she hopes VCU can become an annual participant.

"Since the Daily Planet is our neighbor, we'd like to do whatever we can," she said.

Located two blocks from campus at 302 W. Canal St., the Daily Planet is a non-profit agency for the chronic homeless that provides meals, beds

and clothing.

The agency estimates that there are 5,000 homeless people in Richmond.

Both the Daily Planet and the Emergency Shelter offer the homeless the opportunity to use their shelters as resident addresses for job applications.

Carolyn Davidson, executive director of the Foodbank, said, "The radio station provided about 2,000 pounds of food to the three agencies in this year's drive."

The Foodbank "acts like a clearing house for food to other agencies," said Davidson. "We distributed over 3 million pounds of food last year."

The non-profit organization services 37 counties and seven cities over one-third of the state, she said.

Last year's radio-a-thon raised \$50,000 in cash, clothing and food for the organizations, but no one seemed disappointed in this year's lower total.

"It's a lot of fun, and we all enjoy working together," said Davidson.

For Richmond's homeless and needy, Thanksgiving can't come too soon.